

Pallavas

The Pallavas were one of the greatest dynasties of South India. They played significant role in the political, social and cultural history of South India.

Origin of the Pallavas :

There are many views regarding the origin of the Pallavas. B.L. Rice and others identified the Pallavas with Pahlavas or Parthians. But there is no evidence for the migration of the Parthians into the South. Many others have sought to connect them with Jaffna, identified with the island of Manipallavam mentioned in the *Manimekalai*. According to them the Pallavas were descended on one side from the Cholas and on the other from the Naga rulers of the Jaffna. K.P.Jayaswal argues that the Pallavas belonged to the Clan of the Vakatakas as both of them belong to same gotra.

S.K. Aiyangar states that the Pallavas were a family of feudatories of the Satavahanas. This theory has been accepted by many of the historians. He argued that the Pallavas migrated to Tamil Country from the southern parts of Satavahana empire. The Pallavas used Prakrit and Sanskrit, in their inscriptions, patronized Brahmanism and their inscriptions have been found both in Tamil and Andhra region. In the ancient Tamil literature they are mentioned as non-Tamils. It is thus evident that the Pallavas were originally the rulers of the Andhra region. After the end of the Satavahana rule, the Pallavas asserted not only independence but also moved to Tondamandalam and settled there. From this region they extended their sway over the entire Dravida country with Kanchi as their capital.

Early Pallavas :

Pallavas rose to the power during the later part of the Ikshvaku rule in Andhra. Pallava king, Simhavarma defeated the Ikshvaku king Rudrapurushadatta in 300 CE and established Pallava rule in Coastal Andhra, which was known at that time as 'Karmarashtra' and started as a political power in south India. It is believed that Simhavarma (280-335 CE) was the founder of this dynasty and Sivaskandavarman who ruled probably about the beginning of the fourth century CE seems to have been the greatest of the early Pallavas. His dominions extended from the Krishna to the South Pennar and upto the Bellary district. He had performed several Vedic sacrifices. Vishnugopa was the next important Pallava ruler. During his reign Samudragupta invaded South India and defeated him. The 'Allahabad Pillar Inscription' mentions that during the annexation of Samudragupta during 345-350 CE Vishnugopa was the Pallava ruler of Kanchipuram. The Pallava kingdom was attacked by the Chola king Karikala Chola during the time of Trilochna Pallava (350 – 360 CE). This resulted in establishing Karikala's authority over some parts of the Andhra region. Nandivarman I was the last of the early Pallava kings. During his time the Pallava kingdom experienced the invasion of the Kalabhras.

Imperial Pallavas :

Simhavishnu (575 – 590 CE) :

Simhavishnu was the first ruler of this line. Simhavishnu defeated the Kalabhras and laid foundation for the establishment of the “Age of the Imperial Pallavas”. He also defeated the rulers of Chola, Pandya and Chera kingdoms. He was the master of the entire region between the Krishna and the Kaveri. He was a worshiper of Vishnu and had the title Avanishimha (lion of the earth). According to a literary tradition, great poet Bharavi visited his court.

Mahendravarman I (590 – 630 CE) :

Simhavishnu was succeeded by his son Mahendravarman I. He was a versatile genius. He was not only a soldier and statesman, but also a religious reformer, an architect, a poet and a musician. Mattavilasa, Chitrakarapuli, Vichitrachitta, Gundabhara and Lalitankura were the titles assumed by him. The long drawn Pallava-Chalukya conflict began during this period. Mahendravarman I was defeated by Pulakesin II at a place called Pullalur near Kanchi. Pulakesin II almost reached the Pallava capital, but Mahendravarman purchased peace by ceding their Northern provinces to the Pulakesin II.

Mahendravarman I was a follower of Jainism but converted to Saivism under the influence of Tirunavukkarasu or Appar. He studied music under Rudracharya and composed exercises for the practice of students on a variety of Vina known as Parivadini. He has authored the Sanskrit work ‘*Mastavilasa Prahasanam*’. He was a great builder of cave temples. The rock cut caves at Mandagapattu, Dalavanur and Tiruchirapalli were excavated during his time. The Jain paintings found in the rock cut caves at Sittannavasal located in the present Pudukkottai region are attributed to him. His title Chitrakarapuli reveals his talents in music.

Narasimhavarman I (630 – 668 CE):

Narasimhavarman I was the greatest of the Pallavas who raised the power and prestige of the dynasty to an amazing height. He had the title *Mahamalla* or *Mamalla* which means ‘great wrestler’. The Pallava-Chalukya conflict that was started by his father was successfully continued by him. He wanted to take revenge the defeat of his father at the hands of Chalukyan ruler Pulakesin II. He defeated Pulakesin II, in three battles including that at Manimangalam near Kanchi in 642 CE. Pulakesin II lost his life and hence Narasimhavarman assumed the title Vatapikonda (the conqueror of Vatapi).

Another notable achievement of Narasimhanvarman I was his novel expedition to Srilanka, to reinstate the Sinhalese princes Manavarman.

During his reign Hiuen Tsang visited the Pallava capital Kanchi and noted that Buddhism and Jainism flourished in the city besides Hindusim. He also noted that it was the birth place of the celebrated Dharmapala, who became the abbot of the great Vihara of Nalanda. According to his account the people of Kanchi esteemed great learning and Ghatika of Kanchi served as a prominent centre of learning. Besides he was a great builder having constructed Mamallappuram and created the Monolithic Rathas (Rock-cut Rathas) during his reign.

Mahendravarman II (668 – 670 CE) :

Mahendravarman II ruled for a very short period of two years, since he was killed by Chalukya king Vikramaditya I. He also captured Kanchi, the capital of Pallavas and ruled over it for a short period.

Paramesvaravarman I (670 – 695 CE) :

The Pallava, Chalukya conflict continued during the reign of Paramesvaravarman I. After many reverses Paramesvaravarman I finally won a decisive victory over the Chalukyas and their ally, the Gangas. Paramesvaravarman I was called Ugradanda and ‘destroyer of the city of Ranarasika’ in an inscription of his son, Ranarasika was a title of Vikramaditya I. Paramesvaravarman I was a devotee of Siva and built Siva temple at Kuram near Kanchi.

Narasimhavarman II (695 – 722 CE) :

Paramesvaravarman I was succeeded by his son Narasimhavarman II. He had the title ‘Rajasimha’. He enjoyed a peaceful reign and credited with the construction of large and beautiful temples like the Shore temple at Mamallapuram and the Kailasanatha temple at Kanchi. He had the titles like Shankara Bhakta and Agamapriya. He was also a great patron of Art and letters. The famous Sanskrit scholar Dandin is said to have adorned his court. He sent embassies to China and the maritime trade flourished during his reign.

Paramesvaravarman II (728-731 CE) :

Narasimhavarman II was succeeded by his son Paramesvaravarman II. The Pallava kingdom again had to face defeat and humiliation during his reign. The Chalukya, Vikramaditya II attacked Kanchipuram and the Pallava king had to buy peace at a heavy price. However, he was killed in a war with the Ganga king, an ally of the Chalukyas.

Nandivarman II (731 – 795 CE) :

Paramesvaravarman II died without any heir to the throne. After the death of Paramesvaravarman II the Simhavishnu line of Pallava kings came to an end. A mild war of succession was started in between the various branches of Pallavas. But the Samantas and the learned people of the Ghatika of Kanchi selected Nandivarman Pallavamalla, who belonged to a collateral branch of the Pallavas, as the king. There was a renewal of conflict between the Pallavas and Chalukyas. Vikramaditya II invaded the Pallava kingdom, defeated Nandivarman and captured Kanchi. The Chalukyan king, the Vikramaditya II, after scoring victory over the Pallava king, entered Kanchi – the city of Temples. He was wonderstruck by seeing the architectural grandeur of the Kailasanatha temple, the gem of the Dravidian style of Architecture.

Nandivarman was a worshipper of Vishnu and a great patron of learning. During his reign, several old temples were renovated and new ones like the Vaikuntaperumal temple at Kanchi were constructed. The celebrated Vaishnava saint Tirumangai Alvar was his contemporary.

End of the Pallava Rule:

Vikramaditya II's attack and the temporary occupation of Kanchi may be regarded as the beginning of the end of the Pallava supremacy over South India. The Pandyas, the western Gangas and the Rashtrakutas attacked the Pallava kingdom. Dantidurga, the founder of the Rashtrakuta Kingdom, defeated Nandivarman, but the latter offered his daughter Reva in marriage to former and saved temporarily the collapse of the Pallava Kingdom. The Pallava rule lasted till the end of the 9th Century CE. Dantivarman (795 – 846 CE), Nandivarman III (846 – 869 CE), Nripatunga (869 – 899 CE) were the other rulers. Aparajitavarman (903 CE), was the last Pallava king. The Chola king Aditya I defeated the Aparajitavarman and seized the Kanchi region. With this, the Pallava domination over South India came to an end.

Contribution of Pallavas to Indian Culture

Administration:

The Pallavas had a well organized administrative system. Monarchy was the order of the day. The title 'Dharma-Maharaja' assumed by the kings show that they exercised their rule righteously. The king was the head of the state, the fountain of honour, judge, and leader of the armed forces.

The Pallava state was divided into Kottams. The Kottam was administered by officers appointed by the king.

The village is the basic unit of administration. Different types of villages like villages with inter caste population, Brahmadeya and Devadana existed during this period. The village administration was run by various local autonomous assemblies. Sabha, Urar etc., were the most popular assemblies of this period. Every village had got a court of justice, viz. Dharmasasana. Every village was provided with professional servants like potters, weavers, carpenters, smiths etc. It appears that the village acted like self sufficient miniature republics in the Pallava period. Entrusting the administration of a smaller territorial to an assembly or a local autonomous institution appears to be a very important feature of the Pallava polity.

Land revenue was the major source of income. The Pallavas also levied taxes on professions, marriages, manufacture of salt, sugar and textiles, draught cattle etc., It is evident from the testimony of Hiuen Tsang that the people were very hard working and the soil was very fertile, the labourers who did agricultural work were paid in kind.

Religion :

The heterodox religions viz. Buddhism and Jainism were still very active in the Pallava kingdom. It is evident from the testimony of Hieun Tsang that there were hundred Buddhist monasteries and 10,000 Buddhist monks and nuns belonging to the Manayana schools of Buddhism at Kanchi. Jainism enjoyed popularity in the beginning.

Most of the Pallava kings were the followers of both Vaishnavism and Saivism. The Pallava kings assumed not only the title "Dharma-Maharaja" but also performed the Vedic sacrifices like Agnisthoma, Vajapeya and Asvamedha sacrifices, which were in conformity

with the Vedic sacrifices. Thus Buddhism and Jainism lost the royal patronage and mass support.

This paved the way for the rise of Vedic religion. Besides the performance of Vedic sacrifices, the worship of gods Brahma, Vishnu and Siva became popular. From the 7th century onwards the Nayanars and Alvars contributed to the growth of Saivism and Vaishnavism. This is known Bhakti movement. The cult of Bhakti began to dominate the religious life of the South Indians, and the Alvars and Nayanars played a great part in propagating it.

The Vedic tradition was further reinforced by a movement started by Sankaracharya. This movement was aimed at cleaning the Vedic philosophy of its obscurities and its inconsistencies thereby making it both comprehensible and acceptable to the people at large. Sankaracharya achieved fame by advocating Advaita philosophy.

Education and Literature:

The Pallavas were great patrons of learning. The University of Kanchi became the nucleus of learning and intellectualism. It attracted students from different parts of India and abroad. The founder of the Kadamaba dynasty, Mayurasarman, studied Vedas at Kanchi. Dharmapala, who later became the Rector of Nalanda University, belonged to Kanchi. The Ghatikas and Mathas were the other Brahmanical educational institutions attached to the Temples. Sanskrit, the language of privileged, became the recognized medium in the Brahmanical institutions of the period.

Several works in Sanskrit were produced during this period. The *Kiratarjuniyam* of Bharavi, *Dasakumaracharita* of Dandi and the *Mattavilasaprahasana* of Mahendravarman I were the best Sanskrit works of the period.

The Tamil literature had also developed under the patronage of the Pallavas. Tiruvelluvar, the author of '*kural*' lived during this period. Perundevanar was patronized by Nandivarman II and he translated Mahabharata into Tamil. The '*Thevaram*' composed by the Nayanars and '*Nalayaradivya Prabhandam*' composed by the Alvars represent the religious literature of the period. The Tamil devotional saints exploited music and dance to realize the 'concept of compassionate God'. The religious hymns were sung with the accompaniment of music and dance. This became a regular feature in the temple festivals.

Art and Architecture:

The religious revival of the period gave an impetus to the architectural activity. The contribution of the Pallavas to the Indian Art and Architecture is immense. In fact the history of Dravidian style of Indian Architecture in the south began with the Pallavas. It was a gradual evolution starting from the cave temples to the monolithic Rathas and culminated in structural temples.

The Five Rathas popularly called as the '*Pancha Pandava Rathas (Rock-cut Rathas)*' at Mamallapuram signifies five different styles of Architecture. The Kailasanatha temple at Kanchi and Shore temple at Mamallapuram remain the finest examples of early structural

temples of the Pallavas. The Kailasanatha temple is the greatest Architectural master piece of Pallava Art.

The Pallavas had also contributed to the development of sculpture. The Mandapas contain beautiful sculptures on its walls. The sculpture depicting the 'Descent of Ganges or the Penance of Arjuna' at Mamallapuram is a master piece of classical art. Music, Dance and Painting had also developed under the patronage of the Pallavas. The Paintings at the caves of Sittannavasal belonged to the Pallava period.

Spread of Indian Culture:

The crowning achievement of the Pallavas was that they became torch-bearers of Hindu culture in South-East Asia. This later on paved the way for the creation of Greater India.